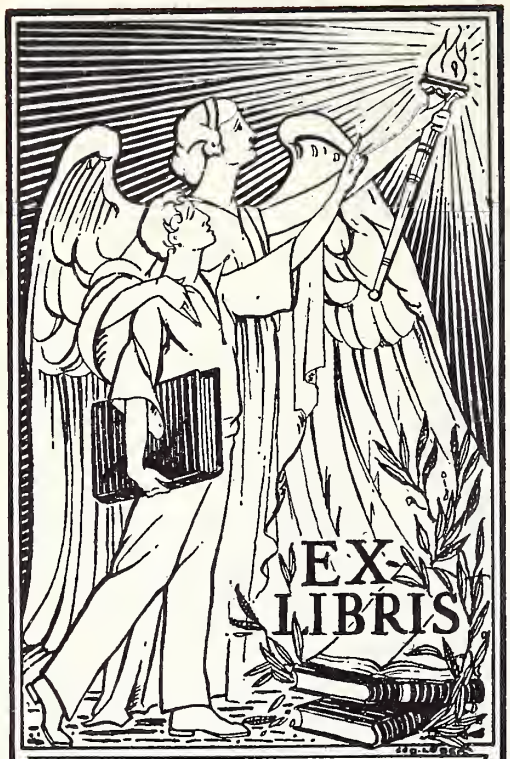
BLIND JILSON

Jean Thomas



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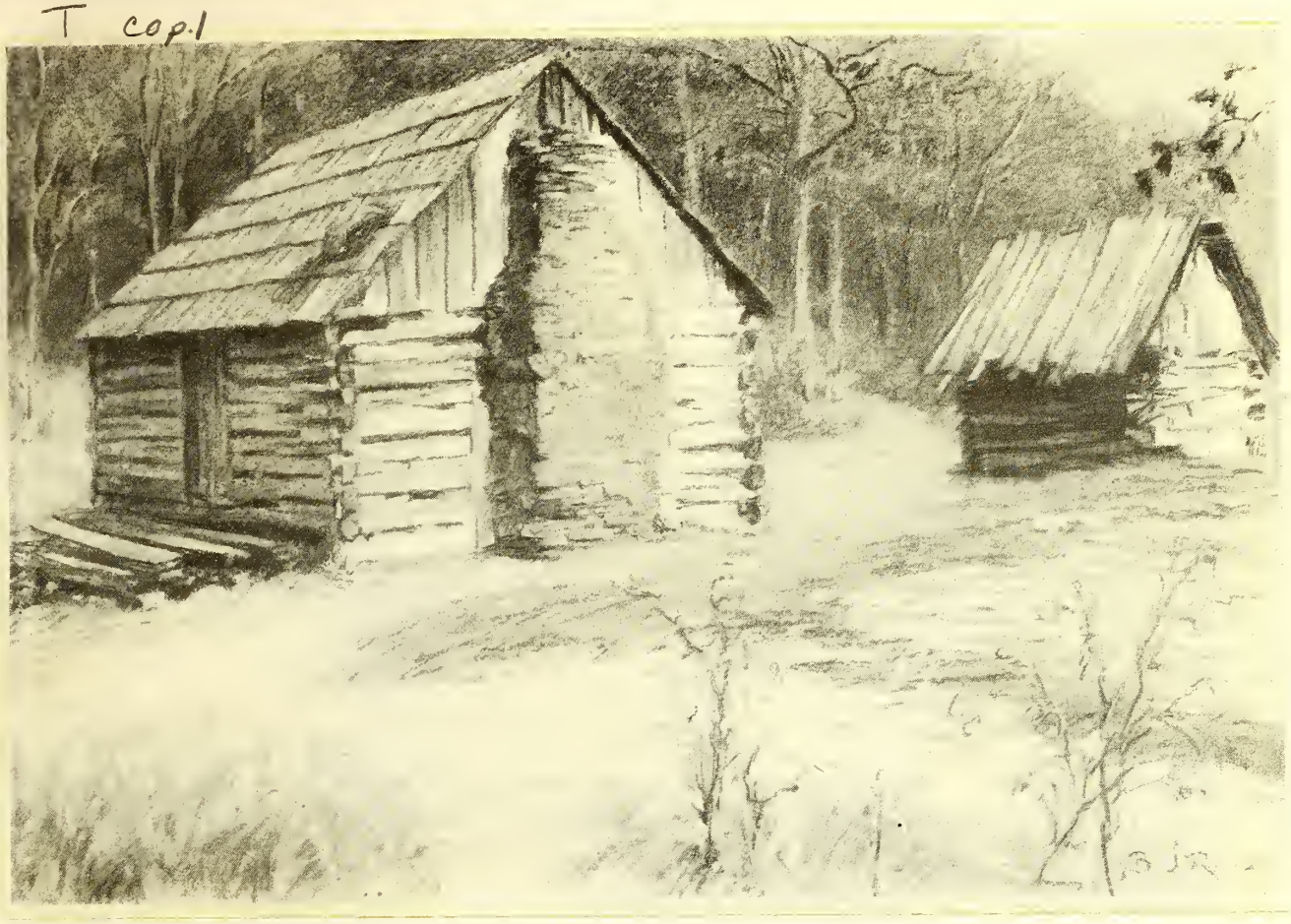


Blind Jilson—*The Singing*

A true story that is

By JEAN THOMAS

THE courthouse bell in Morehead, county seat of Rowan County, Kentucky, clanged bright and early one day, and I gathered up my portable typewriter, books, and pencils, and made my way across the dusty road to the queer little Seat of Justice. As I went up the steps, I heard the strains of a fiddle and noticed a bevy of mountain people gathered about a fiddler standing in the shade of a big oak tree.

When the last note of the old fiddler's song died away, I clapped loud and long. I was charmed with the way he played and sang *The Lady Went A-Huntin'*—one of the loveliest and rarest of Elizabethan ballads. I turned to a lawyer standing near me. "Who is he?" I asked.

"Some call him Blind Jilson," answered my informant indifferently. "Setters is his name, I think. He's been hanging around on court day ever since I can remember."

"Uncle Jilson!" I called out to him (I had already learned the mountain custom). "Can you play *The Brisk Young Farmer*"?

I saw him pull a young fellow by the coat sleeve. The boy bent over to hear what the fiddler had to say and I heard him answer: "She's the short-writer the Judge fotched in. She sots down every word a body says in court—court reporter they calls her."

Then Jilson Setters raised his fiddle to his chin and, jerking a thumb in my direction, announced: "I'm aimin' to play a anshunt piece fur that woman! This piece is called *Damon's Winder*," he called out. "Don't reckon none of you young fellers around here can hardly memorize it. My grandsir learnt hit to me, this hure piece, and he's dead and gone fifty year or more."

With masterly ease he played it to the end—*Damon's Winder*, the loveliest frolic tune that ever fell on human ear.

The old man did not dream of what was going on in my mind. What did he know of the outside world, of recording and broadcasting? But one thing I had come to know—that was the way of mountain people. It would take time, patience, stratagem, perhaps, to gain my purpose. I thanked Uncle Jilson for his music and told him that I wanted to hear him play many more pieces. He smiled and said, "I'm satisfied you will, fur they tell me court's goin' to hold ten days and I'm aimin' to sot hit out."

A FEW days later—court having adjourned for the week-end—I took occasion to ride out one sunny Saturday afternoon to see the old fiddler's wife. In the meantime, I had heard more and more of Jilson Setters' ballads each day. We talked, too every day and he had told me, "The woman's got a turrible misery in her side; keeps me troubled."

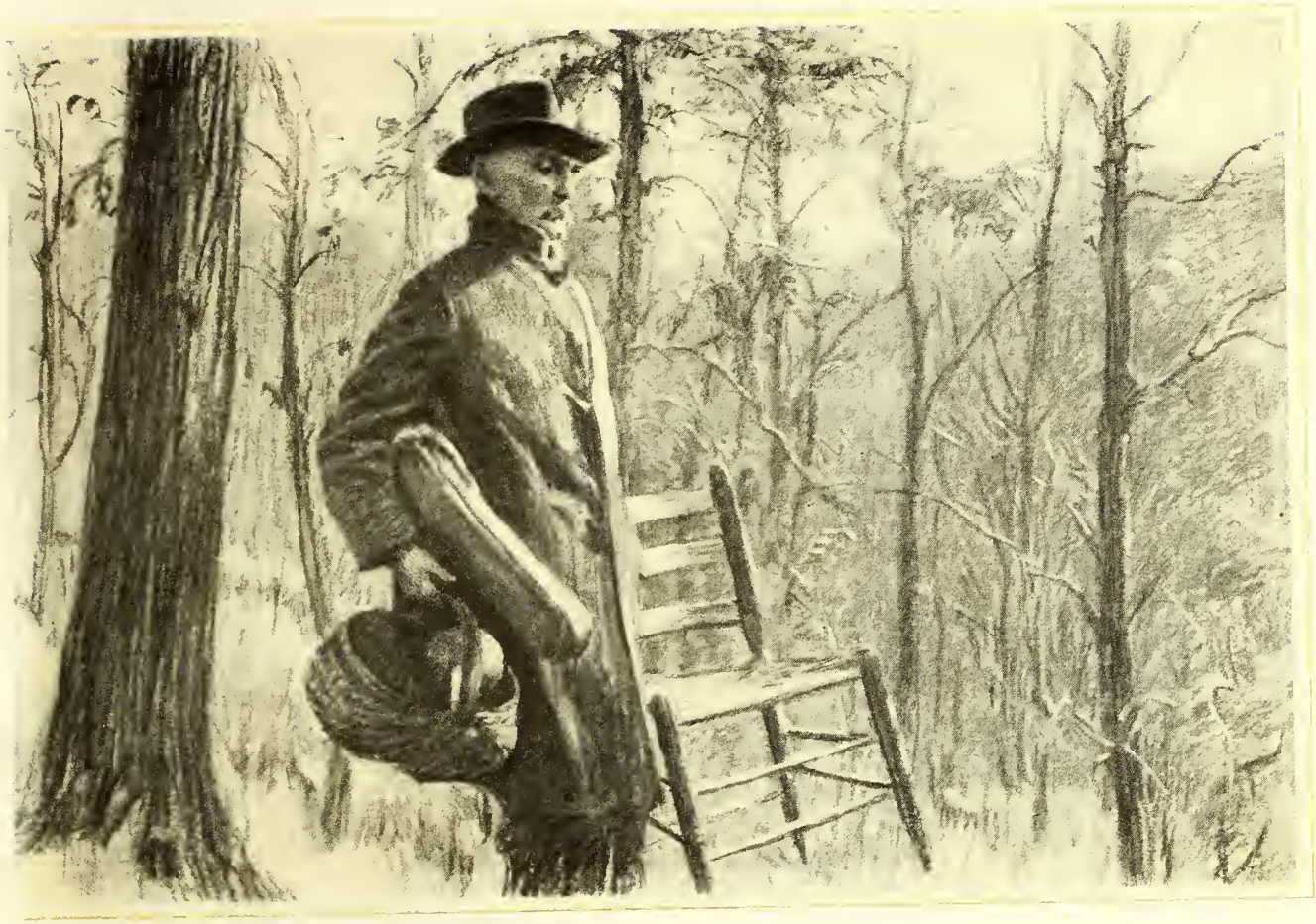
"Land sakes, come right in. Fetch your cheer right alongside me," Jilson's Rhuhamie greeted me from her place by the hearth. "I'm foolish [frail] and kind o' drinlin' with this hure misery in my side. But I reckon all a body needs in this world is a chanct to git to a better. Jilson's named hit to me a time or two about you. You're the short-writer, I take hit?"

We had a nice visit and Jilson played many ballads for me. After that, every time I got into the community, I always "took the day" with the Setterses, and they both proudly admitted to the Judge that they had "tuck a likin' to that short-writer, 'cause she's common, eats our vittals, and, land sakes, didn't she wash my dishes for a span when I had a felon on this hure finger!"

It was an event when at last I came, with my typewriter, and "sot down" the ballads which Jilson sang. To the amazement of the old folks, I "writ 'em off on the quare contrapshun," and

PHOTOGRAPH BY EDWARD GROUT, N. Y.

This is Grace Bowen as the camera sees her. During the past two years Miss Bowen has posed for more than a hundred and fifty artists. Even more important than her flawless proportions, say the men who have painted her, is her ability to realize in expression and posture the character they have in mind



Fiddler *of* Lost Hope Hollow

stranger than fiction

ILLUSTRATED BY B. J. ROSENMEYER

gave them to Jilson to keep. Carefully he locked the precious sheaf of papers in a hide-covered chest that stood by the chimney corner.

"Now my ballets is safe!" and Jilson smiled contentedly.

"But what about your music?" I prodded him. "I can't capture it with *my* machine, although there's another machine that would catch it for you."

Here Rhuhamie interrupted us.

"Beech Dillon, Euphemie's Beech," she said, "he's a eye doctor, he handed that same kind o' talk to Jilson a time or two. Beech claims he kin give Jilson some eyesight, if he'll go 'long with him, way off som-whurs. Beech is a awful knowin' man—" Rhuhamie stopped short—for a stalwart fellow stood in the doorway. "Howdy, Beech, come in, and git you a cheer," the old couple greeted simultaneously. "This hure is the short-writer," said Rhuhamie proudly.

SO IT was that I came to know the eye doctor. And from that day on, I had hopes (with such an enthusiastic ally for support) that Jilson was going to see, and that he would one day give his ballads to the world.

To be sure, it was not going to be easy sailing. In fact, from the time I first heard Jilson fiddling in front of the courthouse until I actually watched him making records in New York City, two years had elapsed. It took that long to prevail upon him to leave his windowless cabin in Lost Hope Hollow and make the journey out into the world.

For all his sixty-odd years, blind Jilson Setters had never been on a train. He had never heard of a phonograph, the radio, an airplane until Euphemie's Beech brought back word of these marvels.

All his endurin' life blind Jilson Setters had lived there in the selfsame place, in the selfsame way, like his kin before him—in Lost Hope Hollow. Generation after generation, they had plodded on, unlettered, content, unmindful of the world that lay beyond their mountain walls. Jilson had watched, in his blind way, his grandmother there beside the log fire make candles just as Shakespeare's mother must have made them. And from the time he was jolted in a "gum crib" he had heard his grandsire, "Fiddlin' Rance," sing ballads of princes and kings. Old, old tales, woven to old, old melodies gathered by Setters' Anglo-Saxon forbears from the minstrels of Shakespeare's time.

JILSON'S afflictions seemed to be made up to him in lots of ways. Folks from the mouth of the creek to the head of the hollow could tell you: "Ag'inst Jilson were turned six, his grandsire, 'Fiddlin' Rance,' taken notice the little blind feller were a Setters to his finger ends. Follered music, like bees honeysuckle, so the old man rived him a fiddle outen a pine log."

By the time young Jilson was fourteen he could call anyone by name the countryside over, the minute they bade him the time of day. And already folks would come for miles to fetch him home with them to fiddle for a gathering. If Bingo barked, Jilson knew whether his dog scented a squirrel or a possum. If a nag whinnied, even down at the mouth of the hollow, he could tell who was riding toward the cabin. Apt, too, he was, with horses! No one ever got the best of Jilson Setters in horse swoppin'. Loved a nag! Seemed to give him joyful independence to ride, sitting erect on the nag's bare back, proudly alone—no leading hand to pilot him. He could mimic the call of every bird of the forest about him. They trusted him, took a liking to him.

"Sleight" too, he was, at many tricks which quite captivated

folks. Why, Jilson Setters would have been the delight of any gathering, even if he hadn't been "the fiddlin'est and singin'-est feller in the holler." Like the time at Arimathie Holbrook's infare. Laid his fiddle on his knees and began. From all sorts of impossible places, Jilson Setters deftly drew forth horse-chestnuts, arrow-heads, pawpaw seeds, and pine cones. His magic fingers transformed his red bandanna "hanksher" into amazing forms—funny little figures, a rabbit with standing ears, a squirrel's head, a jack-in-the-pulpit. Then he asked for another chair to be put beside him. "I'll pay a *for*fit of a extrie tune if I miss guessin' who's sottin' in the cheer. Now, afore we start, married folks and single-men-folks ain't allowed in this hure *con*-test!"

They roared at Jilson's speech and the play party started.

The girls he knew the minute they giggled. Then old Uncle Bish, thinking to get the best of Jilson, slipped into the chair and tittered, fine-like. "My hearin's good yit, Uncle Bish," drawled the blind lad, playfully putting a hand on old Uncle Bish's square-rimmed spectacles. And when Lawyer Ezrie slipped quietly on tiptoe in front of Jilson to take his chance at the chair, that "fixie-feller" was stopped short. Jilson touched Ezrie's vest pocket; "I'm aimin' to carry a tooth-brush, Ezrie, and a comb in my vest pocket, too, when I start courtin'," and the folks roared at Lawyer Ezrie's expense.

SOMEONE over in a dark corner whispered, "Go along, Rhuhamie, hit's your turn!" And the reluctant Rhuhamie Mayhew was dragged forth. She sidled timidly up to the chair and sat with hands primly clasped in her lap, biting her lips, and blushing to the roots of her golden hair. Not until the girls tittered, was blind Jilson conscious of her presence. Then he reached out a trembling, boyish hand. Gently he touched her shoulder, her throat. His fingers swept ever so lightly her cheek, her soft golden hair, and back again to her shoulder and throat. "Got on her mammy's josie," he said playfully. "Hit's worlds too big fur you, Rhuhamie."

The boyish hand caressed Rhuhamie's cheek, a brief second. She lifted her great dark eyes to those of the sightless lad. He smiled. Rhuhamie's heart thumped wildly, and Jilson, picking up his fiddle, sang a gay melody.

At eighteen—being three years wed to Rhuhamie Mayhew and settled down with twins and an odd one—Jilson Setters went forth often at the neighbors' urging to liven a gathering with fiddling and singing.

To be sure, the preacher, whose only joy on earth was "funeralizin' a corpse," looked with disfavor upon the fiddle. One meeting day, he made occasion to beseech his flock to take warning of the devil and his ways—"a feller with a fiddle." Whereupon meek eyes peered from under slat bonnets in the direction of blind Jilson and his mate. And old Granny Croswite from Creepin' Spider Creek poked her bony elbow into Rhuhamie's ribs, and whispered into Rhuhamie's ear with conscientious wistfulness: "D'ye reckin thar's any harm in a fiddle?"

Then and there Rhuhamie Mayhew Setters—like the Mayhews, she was, strong-minded, not afeared—clutching little two-months-old Arazillie in her arms, got up and spoke her mind. And Jilson, poor blind Jilson, a twin on each knee, trying his best to pull her down on the bench by her apron strings. "If the good Lord Hisself tuck a man's eyesight," spoke Rhuhamie, "an' in hit's stead gifted him with fiddlin' an' singin' ballets, an' hit pleasures folks to hear; an' if a body's puny and his land ain't yieldy, an' he's bound to make out 'twixt crappin' a leetle on shares, an' fiddlin' now and then at a weddin', a infare, or a play party to yearn a honest livin' for his little uns and his woman, can't nary soul fault him fur hit!"

IT WAS an evening in September, and early frost had stripped the trees of their leaves, and deadened the grass and ferns, leaving Lost Hope Hollow unadorned and desolate. Euphemie Dillon's Beech had come to take the night with Jilson and Rhuhamie. Doctor Beech Dillon now! No more homespuns and his pa's old galluses, but a "mighty knowin' man—a eye doctor," come back to Lost Hope Hollow for the first time since he went off to get learnin', ten—twenty—twenty-five years ago.

Jilson took down his fiddle from the mantelshelf, after the meal was over, and he and Beech dragged their chairs before the fire, while Rhuhamie washed the dishes. Jilson raised the fiddle to his chin and tilted back in the straight hickory chair. One boot heel caught in the rung of the chair, braced Jilson's spare frame; the other tapped the bare floor with rhythmic beat to a lonesome tune.

Meanwhile, Beech studied the sightless eyes. Later, he told me that his thoughts were racing along: "It can be done! It's not too late! It can be done! But the patient must be eager to see. Jilson is uncomplaining, content. But Rhuhamie! Persuade her, and the battle is more than half won."

All the while, Jilson's fiddle moaned, and Jilson crooned in plaintive voice:

I wish I had known before I courted
That love had been such a killing crime;
I'd have locked my heart with a key of golden
And tied it down with a sil'er line.
Young man, never cast your eye on beauty,
For beauty is a thing that will decay;
For the prettiest flowers that grow in the garden
Soon will wither and fade away.

Jilson's mate rubbed her palms on her thin hips. There was a wistfulness in her voice: "'Peers like I can't 'bide them lonesome tunes no more, Jilson, bein' as all the youngins is gone. Putts me to studyin'. D'ye reckon—you—could fiddle a frolic tune? Like you used to—"

Fiddles have their contrary spells, just like folks, and they can lead folks too, if they take a notion. Surely his grandsire's fiddle was leading Jilson, making his fingers prank now in a rollicking tune, now "quilin'" him down to a sorrowful strain, and now swaying him into a crooning song.

The songs ended. They sat in silence a moment; the three—blind Jilson, Rhuhamie, and Dr. Beech Dillon. Euphemie's Beech spoke first:

"They're too fine to be lost, Jilson!—the songs as you sing and play them. There are folks out in the world that would be delighted to hear those ballads—hear you sing them. And they have ways of preserving music, the voice. I'll take you out where they do it and bring you back to Lost Hope Hollow. It will be a pleasure to folks to hear, and you have no right to hold back. Your duty will haunt you!"

That was too much for even the meek Rhuhamie to endure—her own words coming back to her through all the years. Yes, she had said that very thing: "Hit pleasures folks to hear"—said it right out in meeting that time. "For all Jilson is a pore man, he's honest," the thin voice trembled. "He don't aim to hold back nothin' that ain't his'n. And as for bein' haynted, nary Setters by name ever was bewitched in no fashion and Jilson ain't one to lay hisself liable now. Fur all he ain't never sot foot on railroad cyars—hit's jest twenty mile off yonder over the mountain—I'm not afeared. Go 'long, Jilson!" Rhuhamie's head raised high, just as it had in meeting that time. "I'm wantin' you to do whatever is your bounden duty to do. P'zarve your ballets, Jilson Setters, p'zarve 'em and broadkaist 'em, if it calls for sweetin' or gunpowder! I'm not afeared. Go 'long I'll be waitin' fur you in Lost Hope Holler when you come back. . . ."

But before Jilson Setters was to "p'zarve his ballets," he was first to make an excursion out into the world in search of his eyesight. After much persuasion on the part of "Euphemie's Beech," Jilson agreed to accompany the doctor to a hospital in Louisville for the necessary operation. As he explained to Rhuhamie, "Hit ain't as though I had nary thing to lose."

And so it came to pass that one day, from the cabin door, Rhuhamie watched her man trudge forth behind Euphemie Dillon's Beech, fiddle in oilcloth poke, hickory chair under arm. "A body might want to rest a spell," Jilson explained. In his other hand he carried a willow basket filled with his wearin' clothes and his drinkin' gourd—might get thirsty on such a long journey on the "cyars."

IT WAS all of three weeks later that he returned.

"I'm plumb tuckered out, Rhuhamie," drawled Jilson, as with faltering step he crossed the threshold of his cabin. The wayworn traveler tossed his dilapidated felt on the floor and blinked incredulously at his mate, and Rhuhamie, turning suddenly around from the fireplace, thin fingers gripping bony hips, peered uncertainly at her spouse.

"Whar's Beech?" She looked about in perplexity.

"He never fotched—me—back," said Jilson hesitatingly, "and I ain't aimin' to have no livin' soul lead me around no more!" He stood proudly up and walked toward Rhuhamie, arms held straight out in front of him. But space was—and still is—the hardest thing for Jilson Setters to learn, so long had he walked in darkness. He bumped into a chair. He stalked straight into Rhuhamie. Resting a hand upon her shoulder, he closed his wide, staring eyes and touched her throat; the old linsey-woolsey dress was buttoned close up about her thin neck. With eyes still closed, he brushed her cheek lightly with slim, sensitive fingers. He rested a trembling hand upon her hair. "You're like I calculated you wuz, Rhuhamie!"

"I told the spare-built man he'd be bound to drag the rug from under my feet 'cause I couldn't hear my heel a-knockin' the time. 'An' what's more,' I sez, 'you'll haf to take away that leetle fryin' pan a-stickin' up on that long handle'"

And Jilson Setters opened wide his eyes and for the first time looked squarely upon his mate of a half century. "Yas, you're pint blank like I knowed you wuz then, at Arimathie Holbrook's infare; a leetle gal with her Ma's josie on, with hair of golden and cheeks as soft as a kitten's ear."

Rhuhamie sank slowly into a chair. "Lord God Almighty, You've give him his eyesight—" the quavering voice whispered. She gripped the sides of the chair.

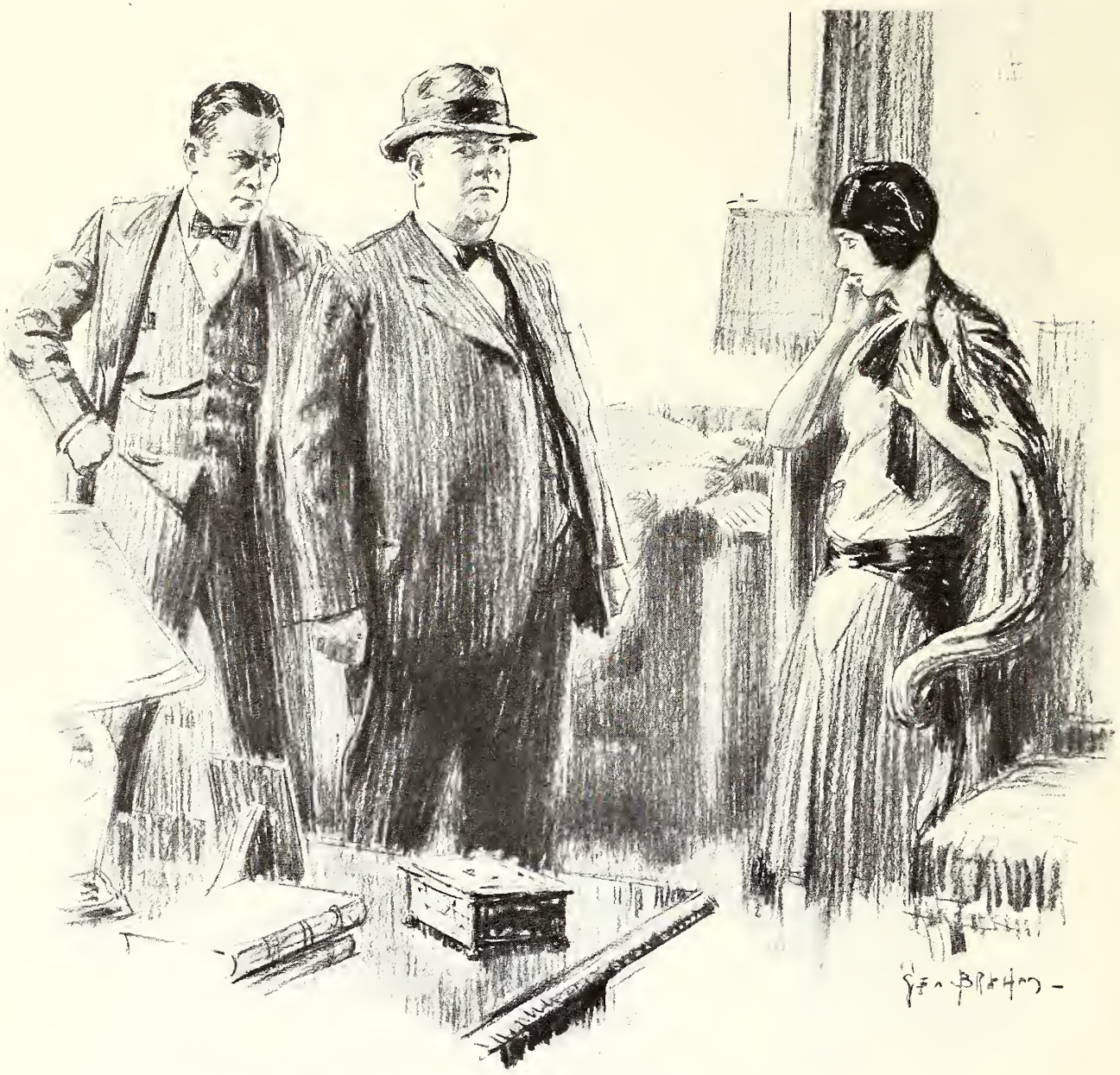
Setters menfolks knew how to "make light" of a thing to give their women ease. "Yas, they give me sight—the Lord and Euphemie Dillon's Beech, and t'other eye doctor lendin' a helpin' hand." He drew up a chair and placed the basket on the floor at his side.

Then he told how after they got in the railroad train on the other side of the mountain, Beech "norrated" about a lot of folks he knew who had regained their sight.

"I seed a sight o' curiosities out in the world," said Jilson, "an' I reckon a body won't never git it all norrated 'twell the end o' time."

Rhuhamie made haste to set the table. "Jest drag your cheer alongside the table hure, an' quile down." Her voice was soft as the music of a mountain stream. Her dark eyes shone with repressed excitement. "Git a passel o' hot vittals in your stummick afore you begin. You look plum peekid out o' your eyes, an' pale as a bed sheet. 'Peers like they's a heap o' change in you." She surveyed the forlorn Jilson. "Hure, take some more of the snaps, an' sorghum, an' ham-meat—an'—buttermilk." Rhuhamie stood behind his chair and plied her spouse with copious helpings of the simple fare.

The meal over and the supper things cleared away, Jilson tilted back in his chair, feet sprawled out in front of him. He looked contentedly into the fire. "A body's got to live and learn," he began, half to himself. His helpmeet replenished the logs, brushed up the hearthstone with the turkey-wing, (*Continued on page 166*)



Jim Hanvey Intervenes

By OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE BREHM

IT WAS perhaps the most modest structure on a street of unpretentious houses, but it was unmistakably a home. It stood back of a tiny lawn which had been mowed to velvety smoothness, and shafts of soft yellow light streamed from its downstairs windows.

A tiny street car stopped impertinently at the corner where the big arc light glared, and a Gargantuan figure alighted. The tremendous bulk of human flesh stood uncertainly, and then accosted a couple of small boys who were headed toward the neighborhood movie house.

"You kids know where Ed Burman lives?"

"Yeh, we know." The smaller of the two was openly amused at sight of the big figure. "It's the fourth house on the right."

"Thanks, son," said the stranger, and waddled slowly into the shadows. The boys crossed the street, then turned to call after him.

"Fourth house," they shrilled. "Don't forget—Fatty."

Jim Hanvey chuckled. His size appeared to afford so much amusement to the world in general. And there was, as Jim himself admitted, a great deal of it. He had long since lost any vestige of figure; he had an amazing waistline, an enormous neck, a huge head, and legs which seemed always on the verge of refusing to support him.

His movements were slow and deliberate, and even in the broadest daylight the mountainous detective seemed about to slumber. That was, perhaps, due to his eyes: fishlike orbs which were perpetually half curtained by lazy lids; eyes which looked at one as though their owner was in a trance—and didn't care. Yet Hanvey was known as perhaps the keenest detective in the country; a man of infinite cunning, deep human sympathy, and dogged determination.

He sighed as he turned in at the Burman home. It was such a cozy place, and the glimpse he caught through the window was one of superb serenity. Ed and Dot! Gosh! . . . What a difference between this little forty-dollar-a-month cottage and the suite at the Ritz where he had last visited them. Jim shook his bulbous head as he crossed the veranda and rattled the

Blind Jilson—The Singing Fiddler of Lost Hope Hollow

(*Continued from page 65*)

and replaced it on the mantelshelf. Then she settled herself in a straight hickory chair; hands meekly folded in her lap. "Jilson"— she spoke softly, eagerly— "I'm wantin' the worst way to hure you make talk."

Dozing in his chair, Jilson opened his eyes and blinked. He crossed one knee over the other and caught his thumbs in his galluses. "Do you know, Rhuhamie, when they first unwropt my eyes, I ketched sight of the sky way off yonder. 'What do you see?' That wuz the eye doctor. 'Hit's bound to be a glass window,' I sez, 'a-lettin' the sky and the sun in hure. I know I ain't in heaven, for I got a turrible misery in my head and eyes.' 'What's this?' Beech axin' this time— him and the eye doctor didn't show theirselves yit. 'Why, hit's a woman standin' in front of me—the purtiest woman I ever seed. She's bound to be the purtiest,' says I, 'cause she is the *fust woman* I ever laid eyes on.' Beech and tother doctor called her name 'Nurse.'

"The houses out there are stuck fast together, no land betwixt 'em; one crib sot right on *top* of tother'n, not beside hit like cabins now-a-days with a entryway betwixt the two cribs.

"No difference where you go," Jilson went on, "you can't set foot on grass, nor stumble over rocks, nor sink in soft mud. The roads is all covered with stone, smooth mighty nigh as my hand. Mighty tiresome walkin', Rhuhamie. Wearies a body.

"When they turned me loose from the eye doctors, Beech come and fetched me away hisself and taken keer of me. We got into a 'taxes,' Beech called hit. Didn't have no nag hitched to it; nothin' shovin' either. A feller in the front seat was layin' over a wheel, clutchin' onto hit—give hit a couple zigzag jerks an'—quicker'n you kin blink your eye we wuz thar where we ketched the train for home."

THREE months later, long before Jilson had half finished "norrating" the wonders of his trip to Louisville and the hospital, he made his second venture into the outside world, this time for the avowed purpose of "p'zarving his ballets." But on this occasion it was I, the "short-writer," who accompanied the old mountain minstrel as guide and mentor. However, I'm going to let Jilson, himself, tell you the story of his adventures, as I later heard him tell it to Rhuhamie. . . .

"We landed in a settle*ment* they called by name *New* York," he began. "Fust thing, we took a ride in one of them taxes me and Dillon rid in in Louisville. Main difference war, in this hure New York, the ground war thick with 'em. But after a spell, we reined up at a feller's house that wanted to hear me fiddle and sing a ballet.

"By the door was a soldier boy, like I heared grandsir tell, with shiny buttons on his coat and a long cape hangin' round his shoulders, and he stood straight as a ramrod. Right inside, there was a leetle room to itself and another soldier boy there. He didn't have on no cape, and the door of the leetle room was open. Soon as we got inside, arn bars bigger and longer'n a gun barrel clapped pint blank in front of my face and nearly ketched my fiddle and cheer. Then the soldier boy tetched a handle and the whole room riz right up. I felt like I wuz a-flyin'. He hollered, 'Six!' and the short-writer sez, 'Out!' The machinery stopped, and back goes the arn bars and we stepped out into a great big, fine, pretty room.

"The floor was plumb covered with a rug, not jest a leetle scrap like Granny used to hook, but it retched all over the floor and was so soft hit was like sinkin' down in a snowbank. Tirectly a whole flock of fellers closed right in around us, right while *that* man who wanted to hear me fiddle was a-shakin' my hand. He was common! I liked him. They called his name 'Roxy.' I sot down in my cheer to rest a spell, putt my basket alongside me, and tuck out my fiddle. Some of the fellers backed off a ways and honkered down behint sticks that had a black box settin' on tôp, and they throwed black hankshers over their heads and peered out from under at me. I ketched the short-writer by the sleeve: 'This hure don't look jest right to me—' Bang! Somebody teched off gunpowder and hollered 'Steady!' Then they all hovered around me ag'in. I al'ays calculated that folks with book learnin' knowed everything, but them folks axed me a sight o' questions.

"ME AND the short-writer putt up at a house bigger'n all the houses in Lost Hope Holler putt together and the church house throwed in," Jilson added proudly. "They kept the place so het up I couldn't take a good night's rest. 'Longside the winder was a big heatin' stove, in the room where I stayed, but no stovepipe, an' I never ketched sight of anybody foirin' hit up. Never got it open myself— no door—no stove cap."

Jilson reflected a moment. "And do you appreciate, I never laid eyes on a spring, nor a well, the whole time I war thar? Draw the water right out of the walls of their houses!"

Jilson rubbed his hands along the seam of his breeches, smiling a bit. "Rhuhamie, there's a heap I'll never git told.

"'Peers like they ain't satisfied with nothin' now'days. They never know when to stop. Why, they even putt a railroad track up on a bridge that sets up over the road. And they's cyars runnin' on *that*, and cyars runnin' on the road right under that. And then, bless you, if they ain't got a long cave dug clear down under the road, and cyars runnin' in that. Subway, the short-writer named hit to me.

"Rhuhamie, I don't look fur the world to stand much longer, ag'inst they git to crowdin' in on us hure in Lost Hope Holler and go ferritin' and burr'in' under the ground and choppin' it plumb to pieces on top and stickin' houses all over hit. Bound to cave in and drap—the good Lord only knows whar hit *will* drap to."

Sometimes Jilson would lose himself

"Jim!"

"Yes, Dot?"

"When you came up here tonight . . . you knew . . . everything?"

"Pretty near."

"You knew that Ote was the one who had stolen the bonds?"

"Sure. I knew that a couple days ago."

"Do you think that I knew it?"

He shook his head. "No, Dot; I don't. I sure don't think you'd have pulled any such stunt as that. I reckon you was pretty well knocked in a heap, eh?"

"I was. And I've been thinking. . . . Jim, if you knew all the time that Otis had those bonds, why did you arrest Ed?"

Hanvey rubbed the palms of his hands together. "Ain't that kind of obvious, Dot?"

"No."

"Well, it was this way: Ed is my friend, and things were clouding up all around him. I didn't know if you'd go through with this; but if you didn't, I wanted to make sure Ed would never know what you'd been thinking of. Then I figured if you did go off with Ote, Ed would do something violent, and pretty soon be in for life on account of a woman who didn't give a durn about him. Any way I looked at it, Dot, it seemed that the only way to keep him out of trouble was to lock him up. As for the MacArthur bonds, we know when Ote got 'em and how. He's been trailed ever since."

Jim snapped the blade of his golden toothpick, as though to put a period to his remarks. "That's all, Dot, or nearly all."

SHE had crumpled into a pathetic little heap in the easy-chair. He stood over her and clumsily patted her shoulder.

"Forget it, kid. Play up; that's all you got to do, and it ought to be easy."

"It will, Jim. . . . I was crying—about you!"

"What about me?"

"What you've done; what you've saved me from . . . and what it'll mean to Ed. And something else. . . . I know that you've hurt Ed, that he'll most likely never feel the same to you again. And you were awfully fond of him."

"I reckon," said Hanvey softly, "that I pretty nearly love Ed Burman. And that's why he mustn't ever know what has really happened. You promise, Dot?"

She nodded. "I promise."

"Good. Now beat it for home. I'm going down and turn Ed loose."

He waved one pudgy paw and waddled to the door. An hour later he stood outside the jail with Ed Burman. Jim didn't dare look at his friend.

"This was a rotten mess, Ed. I was just a plumb fool—thinking you'd gone crooked again. There ain't anything I can do but apologize. I'm sorry."

The face of the tall, dignified man softened. A faint smile touched the corners of his lips. He put a friendly hand on Hanvey's shoulder.

"That's all right, Jim. It was a mistake . . . but I can't kick." He hesitated for a moment, and then: "The only thing that really hurt bad, Jim, was being misunderstood by a friend."

Jim Hanvey's eyes opened slowly and dwelt on Ed Burman's face.

"You're right, Ed," he whispered. "I sure can understand that!"

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in retrospection. But Rhuhamie would touch his knee and he would be off again.

"Folks wuz awful good and kind to me out yonder," he jerked a thumb over his shoulder, "and they spoke mighty pretty to me. Like the mornin' short-writer taken me to make the acquaint-ance of a spare-built man who wanted me to fiddle fur him. 'We want you to feel at home,' sez he, 'come back tonight at eight.' So I tuck along my cheer. I don't like them kind the folks out yonder have, with feather pillows in the seat and acrost the back. A body can't jolt back'ards and for'ards in 'em.

"Arter I sot down with my fiddle, I told the spare-built man he'd be bound to drag the rug from under my feet 'cause I couldn't do no good—couldn't hear my heel a-knockin' the time. 'An' what's more, you'll haf to take that contrapshun away from in front of my face,' I sez. Like a leetle fryin' pan, it wuz, a-stickin' up on a long handle.

"'If we take that away,' sez the spare-built feller, 'ten million people on the hook-up will be disappointed.'

"But I didn't see no one in the place but him and the short-writer and me. Tirectly a young feller poked his head in the far door and hollered: 'All ready! We're going on the air!' And then I fiddled and sung for 'em a spell.

"When I rid in the railroad cyars," Jilson gayly began anew, "I never felt nary grain afeared. The train rolled along on strips of arn and hit never left the road nary time. Easy as sottin' right hure in this cheer. A body don't have to git out of the cyars to git drinkin' water."

AS THE grand finale to his account of his adventures, Jilson took out a mysterious bundle—newspapers! There were great city dailies and glaring tabloids from which the likeness of Jilson Setters confronted Rhuhamie.

"Hit's the spitten image of you, Jilson. Your likeness pint blank!" she gasped.

"Yas, I broadkaisted for 'em," Jilson said, "but I don't credit nothin' I can't see with my own eyes or hear with my own ears. P'zarvin', hit's different."

With fine unconcern he produced a portable phonograph, placed it upon the table, and quickly adjusted a record. "This hure is short-writer's doin's," he said to Rhuhamie. "*She* got you this pretty. First, hit *reads* like the papers . . . arter that you kin hear for yourself."

With hovering stare, Rhuhamie gazed searchingly at the revolving disk, listening breathlessly as it said:

Jilson Setters, whose Elizabethan ballads broadcast over a hook-up from coast to coast and relayed halfway round the world, delighted millions last night. . . . Jilson Setters is a modern survival of the ancient minstrel. . . . Who knows but that his primitive tunes have blazed the trail for American grand opera! Blind for more than a half century, he opens his eyes in a great, modern world.

Rhuhamie sat gripping the sides of her chair as the music came from the phonograph. Then, raising a trembling hand, she rested it ever so lightly on the shoulder of her spouse. There was a look of proud possession in her eyes: "You're somethin' I never knowed you wuz, Jilson—and me married to you nigh onto fifty year!"

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Boxer

(From page 41)

bands of mountain sheep were marooned and starving among the deep drifts covering the eastern slope of Bald Mountain.

Burt thanked the man for notifying him, wondering, with some amusement, what the game commissioners thought could be done in case he did discover the marooned sheep. Finally, he hung up his coat in the lamplight and began to prepare supper. Bald Mountain was a long day's trip. He must start early in the morning to make it there and back.

THE sky was clear and the air crisp when Burt started at dawn. Two hours later the cold began to grow more intense, and signs presaging a storm caused him an uneasiness which he did not like to admit. Still, he was too far along the trip to think of turning back, so he shook off his worries and hurried on. Smoked glasses protected his eyes from the reflected rays of the sun, and his face, where it showed under his fur cap, was blackened with soot from the chimney. Otherwise, the dazzling reflected light would soon have rendered him snow blind, besides burning his face beyond all human endurance. However, if the glasses did protect his eyes, they retarded his progress and forced him to travel at a pace slower than he had intended making.

When he reached the vicinity of Bald Mountain it was past one o'clock, and to his surprise he could find no sheep, or any other animals, on the bleak slopes. No signs indicated that any had visited the vicinity in weeks, and satisfied, after a thorough search, that the game commissioner must have been misinformed, Burt started back.

He had traversed about a mile of the distance toward the cabin when a vague feeling of disquiet assailed him. He stopped and scanned the white stretches of mountain country about him. Nothing was to be seen, and he dismissed his worries as due to being alone so much.

Nevertheless, the creepy sensation returned to assail him, and presently he found himself hurrying, taking unnecessary risks across the dazzling expanse of snow-crusted slopes. Noting this, he checked his stride with disgust and, when he reached Old Squaw, that glassy bit of sloping ridge which one must cross to reach his cabin, he was traveling at normal speed.

Here he removed his snowshoes, the better to negotiate the slope. Carrying shoes, pack, and rifle, he stepped out on the wind-swept drifts. Halfway across, a slight noise caused him to hesitate and glance about. Then, before he could regain his balance on the icy surface, both feet slipped.

Instinctively, Burt released his grip on pack, rifle, and snowshoes, and cast himself flat on the hard crust. Fifty yards he tobogganned down the incline, to bring up against the top of a stunted pine which protruded above the snow. For a minute he lay there, half dazed.

Then, as he sat up, the full extent of his predicament came upon him. Snowshoes, rifle, and pack had disappeared into

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